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THE REALIZATION OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by the International Federation Terre des Hommes, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (Category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[5 August 1991]

1. The International Federation Terre des Hommes (IFTDH) is deeply concerned over the realization of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development, without which the future of a vast majority of the world's children can hardly be improved. The principle of the indivisibility of human rights has been reaffirmed time and again by the relevant United Nations bodies, but in practice the machinery for protecting economic, social and cultural rights is far less elaborate than that for civil and political rights. IFTDH very much hopes that the gap between the two types of rights will be bridged in the years to come.

2. In IFTDH's opinion, lasting respect for all human rights is possible only in a favourable economic context founded on a minimum of social justice. A democracy which is not one only in name assumes its full meaning when it is based on a situation in which economic, social and cultural rights are effectively implemented and the population is literate and has an adequate cultural level. In the view of IFTDH, a stable world order cannot emerge from a chaotic economic situation such as exists at present. The refugee problem, which is causing such concern to the industrialized countries, should also be seen in this perspective.

3. Popular participation is of vital importance in the area of economic, social and cultural rights. In a difficult economic context, the initiatives taken by local and national non-governmental organizations at all levels of society can make a major contribution to improving the lot of disadvantaged persons. It is in the interest of States themselves to acknowledge the value of these local or national initiatives, to support them by all appropriate means and not to impede support for this effort by non-governmental organizations in the developed countries.

4. IFTDH is highly present in Latin America alongside the local and national non-governmental organizations which are trying to alleviate the appalling poverty of certain strata of the population. According to the World Bank, there is no other region of the developing world that offers such a striking contrast between poverty and wealth as Latin America. Although average per capita income is five to six times higher than in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, nearly one fifth of the population of Latin America is still living in poverty. This is because of the exceptional inequalities of income in the region. In the health sector, for instance, Latin America is the region of the developing world with the most professionals in relation to the population as a whole. Yet, only 61 per cent of the population have access to health care, which is below the average for Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

5. The deterioration in the terms of trade has been particularly marked in the case of the Latin American countries. Because of the fall in the prices of their exports, the purchasing power of their export earnings fell by 13 per cent during the 1980s in relation to the 1970s. About two fifths of this decline is due to the erosion of oil revenues.

6. In Latin America there are also many disparities between regions. Poverty is more extensive in ecologically vulnerable areas, which are often isolated in every sense. In such areas non-agricultural jobs are scarce and demand for labour is generally highly seasonal in character. Poverty is also rife in the regions which are more richly endowed with natural resources, but lack social services and infrastructure.

7. In Brazil, according to the United Nations Development Programme, satisfactory human development has not been achieved despite a substantial level of income, rapid growth and considerable social expenditure by the Government. The infant mortality rate is still high - approximately 85°/oo - and life expectancy is around 65 years. This national average conceals deep disparities between regions. In the north-east, for example, the infant mortality rate is twice as high as in the rest of the country, life expectancy

is far below the national average and many more children are affected by malnutrition. Some members of IFTDH are supporting projects initiated by local organizations, particularly in the north-east, to try and alleviate poverty in the rural areas.

8. Poverty in Brazil is due to an unequal distribution of the national product: the most disadvantaged persons have been bypassed by prosperity, despite a high level of social spending. In such spending, Brazil has favoured social security and housing to the detriment of health and nutrition. In the education sector, expenditure has tended to centre on higher education, to which the majority of disadvantaged young people do not have access.

9. In Chile, the Government of Patricio Aylwin has continued the liberal policy of the military regime while declaring its readiness to assume the "social debt" inherited from the dictatorship. According to the Minister for Planning and Cooperation: "per capita income rose by only 1.2 per cent between 1980 and 1989 and it was very unequally distributed, since the income of the richest 20 per cent of the population increased while the income of the remaining 80 per cent declined during the same period. Social spending per inhabitant went down by 30 per cent, producing a critical social situation in urgent need of rectification". The social budget was increased thanks to a tax reform, and mention should also be made of international assistance and a solidarity fund. Inter alia, this budget allowed a small increase in the minimum wage, family allowances and retirement benefits.

10. At the same time, the economic policy for 1990 involved stringent adjustment measures (a massive rise in the interest rate) in order to cope with the risk of inflation. The growth in gross domestic product declined from 10 per cent in 1989 to 3 per cent in 1990. Chile's principal resources are still copper (50 per cent of exports), whose price has remained stable, fruit and timber. There is also the burden of debt, with repayment of interest accounting for 7 per cent of the annual value of production.

11. For the more disadvantaged half of the Chilean population, 2 to 12 per cent of whom are suffering from malnutrition, real change has still to come. While the unemployment rate is low (9.7 per cent), a large proportion of the population is surviving thanks to the informal sector. This means that many families have an average monthly income of $60 when the minimum wage is $74. One of the factors impeding the improvement of material conditions for families is the credit system established under the dictatorship and still in force, known as the Development Unit (UF). Under this system, the payment of a loan in annual instalments is linked to the dollar and undergoes regular devaluations. As a result, a buyer can pay up to 13 or 14 times the original price of his purchase while still not being the owner! Thus any loan becomes a burden that is virtually indestructible and reimbursement becomes impossible.

12. In the health, education and housing sectors, the present Government has such a heavy legacy that no significant change can be expected in the short term. With regard to health, the public sector still lacks the means to provide expensive care. The hospitals are very badly equipped and only private clinics have adequate facilities. As for education, attending university is expensive - an average of $60 per month, plus any costs for

board and lodging. Where housing is concerned, Chile has a shortfall of 1,330,000 housing units. Five hundred thousand families live with their relatives and today more than two million Chileans are housed in conditions of intolerable overcrowding.

13. Some progress has been made in the labour sector, particularly a reform of the Labour Code whose principal achievement is the recognition of trade unions as social partners. The situation of workers has also improved as regards the right to strike, protection in the event of dismissal and the minimum wage. However, there is a category of workers known as temporeros (seasonal agricultural workers) who are particularly disadvantaged and who have not won the right to collective bargaining or association. The temporeros are either peasants who have lost their land or urban unemployed. Their working conditions are very poor: sometimes no housing, transport in cattle trucks, very dangerous exposure to pesticides, keeping of black lists by the big landowners which deprive rebellious temporeros of any possibility of employment, etc.

14. The temporeros are not alone in having difficult living conditions, there are other categories of Chileans too whose economic circumstances are precarious. They include former political prisoners experiencing difficulties in reintegrating in society. After many years of detention and, in the case of most of them, torture, they suddenly find themselves outside without resources, without support and above all without any possibility of finding a job because of their political label. Their de facto marginalization by the authorities is a potential cause of violent reactions. Aware of these problems, a number of non-governmental organizations, including a member of IFTDH, have set up programmes of material or moral assistance for the reintegration of former prisoners.

15. In conclusion, IFTDH would like to recommend that the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities should call upon the Governments concerned:

(a) To work for the establishment of a more just economic order, failing which there may be serious disturbances in the developing countries and also in the industrialized world;

(b) To consult all the social partners in a wide-ranging dialogue before deciding on economic measures for disadvantaged persons so that, as participants and co-initiators of those measures, the disadvantaged can derive genuine benefit from them;

(c) To give legal recognition to the existence and value of the work of local and national non-governmental organizations, to support them by all appropriate means and to protect the life of their members;

(d) To open the doors to international non-governmental organizations wishing to cooperate with local and national non-governmental organizations in order to support their development efforts.